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SUBJECT: OSCE HUMAN DIMENSION MEETING: EMBASSY PRAGUE INPUT

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¶1. (U) Post is providing the following points in response to Reftel request for information on host government's record on matters of basic freedoms and human rights for this fall's HDIM Conference:

¶2. (SBU) The Czech Republic has a strong record of promoting human rights and basic freedoms abroad. One legacy of the Czech struggle against communism, and in particular of Vaclav Havel, many years as Czech president, is the active role the Czech government and NGOs take in promoting democracy around the world. The Czech Ministry of Foreign Affairs has a special unit devoted to transformation policy. It works together with Czech NGOs to support civil society and democratic reforms in countries like Cuba, Belarus, Iraq, Burma, and elsewhere. Likewise, the Czechs are active within the EU and the UN supporting steps that promote democracy and human rights. Prague is home to the USG-funded Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL), which broadcasts to many countries in transition in the former Soviet Union and the Middle East.

¶3. (SBU) The Czech Republic has a more complicated record of human rights promotion domestically. On the positive side, the constitution safeguards freedoms of worship, speech, assembly and conscience, and the government generally respects these rights in practice. However, several problems remain, the most significant among them being the treatment of the country's largest ethnic minority group, the Roma. The country's 200,000-strong Roma community continues to face wide-scale societal discrimination and a lack equitable education, housing, and employment opportunities. In November 2007, the European Court of Human Rights ruled that the state had routinely discriminated against Roma students. At times, societal discrimination has also manifested itself in the form of violence against the Roma.

¶4. (SBU) The Czech Republic is also the last EU member country without anti-discrimination legislation, which the country committed to adopt upon entry to the EU in 2004. In May 2008, President Klaus vetoed a proposed anti-discrimination law, and it is unclear whether the Czech Parliament will be able to override the veto.  
Grabner